



**Director of
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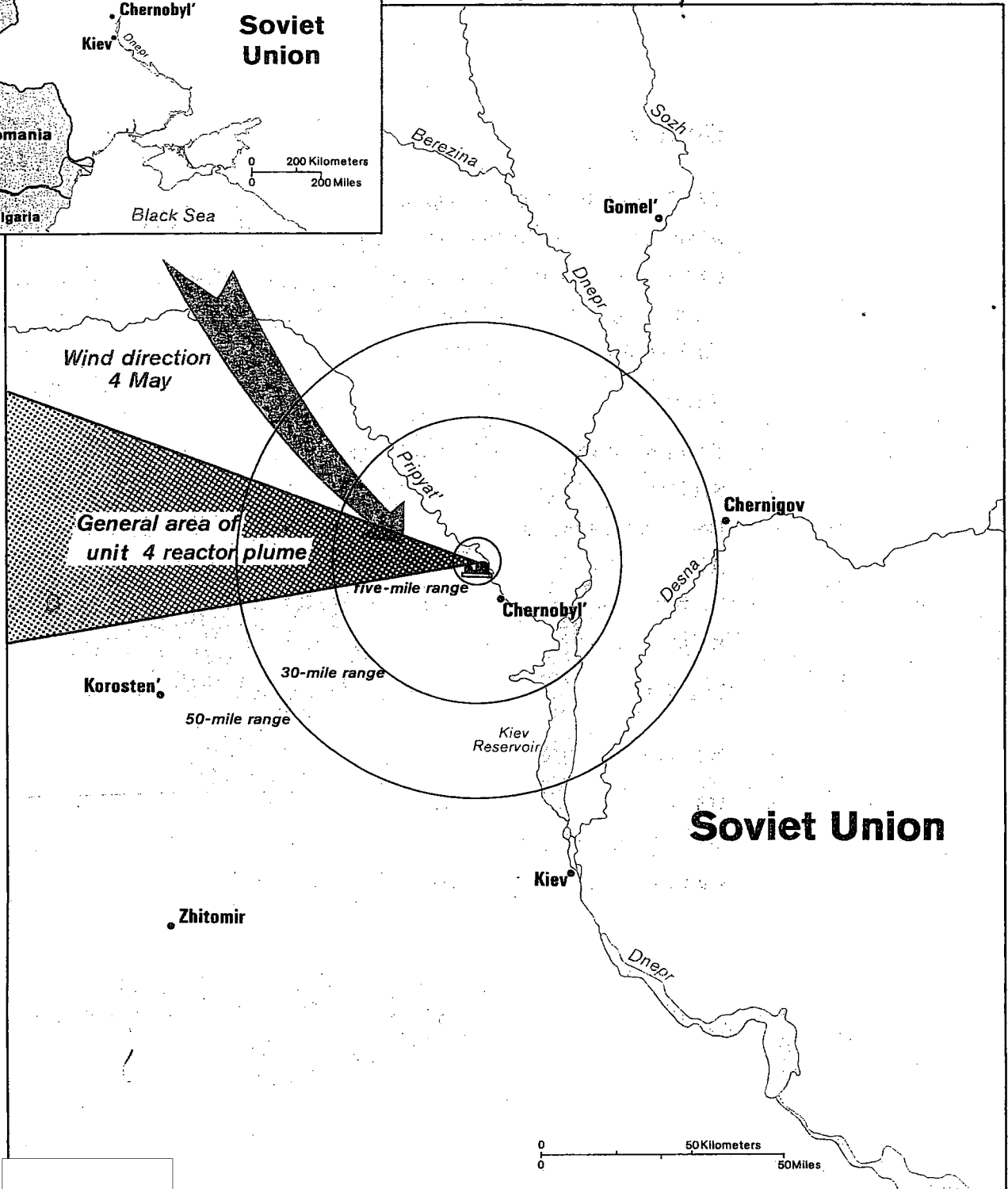
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Chernobyl' Nuclear Accident



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USSR:

Reactor Accident Update

[REDACTED]

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Five hundred buses and 200 trucks were observed in the city and on the roads both into and out of it. The current weather forecast indicates that strong winds of 20 knots are blowing from the reactor site toward Chernobyl'. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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Comment: The wind direction forecast and possible Soviet concern about more radioactive releases or the cumulative effects of radiation already released probably account for this delayed effort to relocate the 44,000 people of Chernobyl'. It may also have been prompted by the visit Saturday of Politburo member Ryzhkov and several other officials, who could have ordered the evacuation as a precautionary measure. [REDACTED]

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The empty cooling ponds near reactor 3 make it unclear how the Soviets are preventing a heat buildup in the shut down reactor. A modest waterflow, in the range of 1,000 to 2,000 gallons per hour, probably could control this heat buildup. If cooling water is not supplied to the reactor, however, core damage would occur after approximately three days, possibly resulting in additional radiation release. [REDACTED]

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Special Analysis

USSR:

Handling of the Chernobyl' Accident

The Soviet suppression of detailed information about Chernobyl' has effectively prevented the Soviet people from learning about the scope of the disaster. Even in the nearby cities of Kiev and Minsk, a surface calm prevails, and any risk of panic will diminish as the immediate health risks become less acute. Moscow will not be able, however, to control altogether the population's access to foreign sources of news. The lack of candor in Soviet media treatment will damage the government's credibility at home somewhat, and the failure to take vigorous measures to safeguard public health in the wake of the disaster may create popular resentment.

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The authorities acted rapidly to cordon off the immediately affected towns of Chernobyl' and Pripyat. Some of the victims evacuated reportedly are being treated in isolation wards of hospitals in Kiev and elsewhere, a measure that partially restricts public awareness of the situation. Reports from Western students and attaches in Kiev after the disaster indicate a "business as usual" atmosphere. Authorities in Kiev put on a show of normalcy and proceeded with scheduled events such as the May Day parade, a bicycle race, and the unveiling of a Lenin monument in a town at the southern end of the Kiev reservoir.

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At the same time, Moscow has attempted to block information from outside, and it may increase efforts along these lines. Kiev already has been closed to travel by US and other diplomats. Reuters reported that a telephone operator in Pripyat was cut off while informing a Western reporter there had been an evacuation. Jamming of Western broadcasts will probably be stepped up, and postal controls for mail destined for the Ukraine can be increased temporarily. Moscow is trying to counter news coming from the West by claiming that foreign radios are putting out "fables" about Chernobyl' in a politically inspired effort to discredit the USSR.

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The leadership is also trying to convey to the population that it is on top of the situation and concerned about the welfare of those immediately affected. This was almost certainly one reason for dispatching Politburo members Ryzhkov and Ligachev to the Chernobyl' area over the weekend.

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One consequence of official efforts to hush up news of the disaster was to increase the risks to public health. According to a press report, the Soviet Foreign Ministry told the Finnish Ambassador that authorities do not envisage special measures to protect the local population. As yet, there is no indication that public health officials in the Ukraine or Belorussia have taken such precautionary measures as

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providing iodine pills and banning sales of milk, as was done in Scandinavia and Poland. Only belatedly did the authorities caution Kiev residents against drinking unbottled water. [redacted]

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[redacted] Kiev residents reportedly have been seen swimming and fishing in the Dnepr River, although the US Embassy reports teachers are now warning their students not to do so. [redacted]

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The Seepage of Unofficial Information

The disaster is too large and world attention is too great, however, for the regime to seal off its population from rumors and the flow of unofficial information. Western radiobroadcasts into the USSR are providing coverage of the disaster. Radio Liberty research has established that in periods of crisis Soviet citizens listen to Western radios at a higher-than-normal rate. Even in periods of heavy jamming, some of the broadcasts get through. [redacted]

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Some concerned relatives in the West—Jewish emigrants to Israel and ethnic Ukrainians in the US and Canada—have succeeded in telephoning Kiev, and Western tourists already have made known the extent of the danger to some residents of Kiev. The US Embassy reports that when a group of American students in Kiev told their Ukrainian friends about the accident, the Soviets initially did not believe the reports but grew less skeptical after the Americans became concerned enough to drink only bottled water. [redacted]

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Polish television can be received in western parts of the Ukraine. Although this source is not as forthright as Western news reporting, Ukrainians who tune in may find out about the public health measures taken by Warsaw—supplying iodine and banning sales of fresh milk. They almost certainly will draw comparisons highly unfavorable to the Soviet regime. [redacted]

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Popular Attitudes

Most citizens probably believe the truth lies somewhere between what they hear from foreign sources and the pacifying message provided by Soviet media. Some Kiev residents have told Westerners they were convinced that foreign accounts were exaggerated, but there also have been signs of public uneasiness about the situation. According to a press report, for example, two French citizens witnessed quarrels breaking out in Kiev as some people tried to stop others talking about the "tragedy" in case they started a panic. [redacted]

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The Soviet public knows little about the nuclear power industry, technologies used by other countries to prevent reactor accidents, or the hazards of radiation. This lack of awareness almost certainly mitigates public apprehension. []

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As the public increasingly realizes that official media have not told the whole story, however, resentment over the regime's handling of the situation may grow, particularly among Ukrainians, many of whom are already resentful of Moscow's domination of their republic. []

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Resentment may focus especially on the lack of warning or of adequate measures to protect public health. Even though the authorities appear to be moving belatedly in this regard, the accident will tax the deficient Soviet medical system. Insufficient attention and capabilities to deal with the situation are likely to fuel popular frustration. At the same time, electricity shortages throughout the Ukraine and in Moscow are likely to result because of the disabled power reactors, which may heighten popular distress. []

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A less immediate consequence of the disaster may be stimulation of worker concerns about hazardous conditions in industry generally. In recent years, inadequate safeguards against factory accidents have become more important as a source of low worker morale and have on occasion given rise to protest activity. []

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Prospects

The authorities almost certainly believe that the damage suffered by providing only sparse and misleading information to local residents and Western governments has been worth it because of the high priority they place on maintaining public order and avoiding politically sensitive disclosures. []

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As the long-term health effects become clearer to people living near the disaster, however, the regime increasingly will have to pay a price. Chernobyl' demonstrates the limitations of General Secretary Gorbachev's yearlong campaign of greater openness and publicity—intended to marshal citizen support for regime policies and to censure corrupt and incompetent officials—and thus will detract from his effort to build public confidence in the system. []

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